McKenna given more security as threats increase; Anonymous vitriol over climate change moves from online to real world

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Environment Minister Catherine McKenna says she was recently walking outside a movie theatre with her children when a car slowly pulled to a stop beside them.

The driver rolled down his window and then he let fly.

"F*** you, Climate Barbie," he shouted, as she tried to back away from his car and get her kids away from him.

Much has been written about the online abuse and threatening behaviour politicians - especially female politicians - and others in the public eye face every day.

But McKenna says as the heat around climate change continues to grow, that abuse is going from anonymous online vitriol to terrifying in-person verbal assaults.

The incident at the movie theatre is just one of several times her kids have been with her when someone in public began to yell at her.

She has been called the C-word, a traitor, an enemy and a "communist piece of garbage."

Her family's safety has been threatened more than once.

Some people have wished she and her children will get fatal diseases.

She has received sexualized messages so hateful they could be enough to make even the hardest of hearts skip a beat.

"Tick Tock, Barbie B****," one read.

"You're a stain on this country and I hope you rot in hell," said another.

The threats have become real enough that McKenna sometimes now requires a security detail, a level of protection even cabinet ministers don't usually get.

"There are places, yes, that I have to have security now and I don't think that's a great situation," she said.

"I'm someone who is trying to do my job, live my life, and talk and engage with people, and it makes it harder. I'm not going to let this stop me but I wish it would stop."

McKenna would not elaborate on the security needs, so as not to reveal when she has less protection.

She said the online abuse in particular has been going on since she was elected, but that in recent months it has gotten much worse in person.

"The challenges, the increases of this, is worrying for everyone," she said.

McKenna is not alone in fearing for her safety. Tzeporah Berman, international program co-ordinator for Stand. Earth, said earlier this summer she has received death threats and was physically assaulted in the Edmonton airport by a man angry about her campaign to close down the oilsands.

Catherine Abreu, the executive director of Climate Action Network, Canada, said the issue is a constant source of frustration and fear for environmentalists.

"We talk about it every single day," said Abreu.

"There are many people in my community who feel they are under threat."

Abreu and Berman both point to politicians as stoking the fires.

Abreu said U.S. President Donald Trump's rhetorical attacks have emboldened people who now feel it is perfectly acceptable to insult, abuse and threaten people they disagree with.

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